

As you know, earlier this year, Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the Democratic majority in Congress rammed through a 1,079 page economic stimulus bill with a trillion-dollar price tag. Members and the public had only 15 hours to read the final legislation.

In June, the Democratic leadership enacted massive new environmental legislation, known as "cap and trade." Republicans and Democrats attempted to offer more than 200 amendments; however, the House Rules Committee allowed only one amendment to be debated on the House floor. The bill was made available at 3:09 a.m. on the morning of the vote.

This is not how the American people expect Congress to operate, hammering out legislation in back rooms in the dark of night.

Legislation that affects the lives, jobs, and welfare of every American should receive adequate and thoughtful consideration, be allowed full and open debate, and be able to be improved with amendments. Its impact and cost should be known before the vote.

Our goal is not how fast or how many bills we can pass. The United States Congress has 435 members, and all should have an opportunity to play an active role in crafting legislation.

To this end, I am a cosponsor of H.Res. 554, a bipartisan resolution that would require all non-emergency legislation be posted online, in its final form, for at least 72 hours prior to a floor vote.

In an effort to ensure this resolution is considered without delay on the House floor, I recently joined over 180 of my colleagues in signing a "discharge petition" that would force Speaker Nancy Pelosi to allow a vote on H.Res. 554.

A discharge petition with 218 signatures or more is a procedural tool that forces a vote on legislation when the Speaker refuses to allow consideration on the House floor.

Watch dog coalitions also pressed last week for passage of the resolution. In a letter to House leaders, 23 coalitions wrote, "As part of the Read the Bill campaign, we believe that it is fundamental to our democratic principles that Members of Congress, their staff, the public and the press have the opportunity to read and digest legislation before it comes to the House floor."

Elected representatives and the American people must have the opportunity to review legislation before it comes to the House floor for a vote.

With health care reform legislation looming, it is imperative members of Congress and the people they represent are given the time to read the final bill before casting a vote that will affect one-sixth of our economy.

It is my hope Speaker Pelosi will instruct Rules Committee Chair Louise Slaughter (D-NY) to hold an immediate hearing on this bipartisan resolution and should schedule it for a vote on the House floor.

Health Care Reform Crafted Behind Closed Doors:

Speaking of the need for transparency, a small group of congressional Democrats and members of the Obama Administration have been meeting behind closed doors on Capitol Hill crafting their government takeover of our nation's health care system.

These meetings have taken place despite President Obama's repeated pledges on the campaign trail last year that these discussions would be open and televised.

In a January 2008 Democratic presidential debate, Obama said, "That's what I will do in bringing all parties together, not negotiating behind closed doors, but bringing all parties together, and broadcasting those negotiations on C-SPAN so that the American people can see what the choices are."

The Capitol Hill newspaper, Roll Call, rebuked these closed door meetings, "All of a sudden, we don't know what's being done — or when, or by whom. ...[T]he secrecy of the proceedings, particularly given where we've come from in the previous few months, is disturbing — as is the lack of diversity in voices shaping the final product. There are no Republicans in the room. If any other Members of Congress have been invited to participate, we'll never know it. ...[T]he sudden silence from the Senate seems like a slap at all the stakeholders who have invested so much in the health care debate — not to mention the taxpayers who will be asked to foot the bill for whatever reform plan does get adopted."

In another effort to make this Congress more transparent and more accountable, my colleague, Congressman Vern Buchanan (R-FL) introduced a resolution demanding that the negotiations of national health care legislation be conducted in the open "under the watchful eye of the American people."

The American people deserve nothing less.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.